December 14, 2009

The Human Rights Agenda for the 21st Century

December 14, 2009
Georgetown University
Gaston Hall
Washington, D.C.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you. It is wonderful being back here at Georgetown in this magnificent Gaston Hall, and to give you something to do during exam week. (Laughter.) It's one of those quasi-legitimate reasons for taking a break – (laughter) – which I'm very happy to have provided.

I want to thank Jas for his introductory remarks, and clearly, those of you who are in the Foreign Service School heard reflections of the extraordinary opportunity you've been given to study here as he spoke about the culture of human rights. It is also a real honor for me to be delivering this speech at Georgetown, because there is no better place than this university to talk about human rights. And President DeGioia, the administration, and the faculty embody the university's long tradition of supporting free expression and free inquiry and the cause of human rights around the world.

I know that President DeGioia himself has taught a course on human rights, as well as on the ethics of international development with one of my longtime colleagues, Carol Lancaster, the acting dean of the School of Foreign Service. And I want to commend the faculty here who are helping to shape our thinking on human rights, on conflict resolution, on development and related subjects. It is important to be at this university because the students here, the faculty, every single year add to the interreligious dialogue. You give voice to many advocates and activists who are working on the front lines of the global human rights movement, through the Human Rights Institute here at the law school and other programs. And the opportunities that you provide your students to work in an international women's rights clinic are especially close to my heart.

All of these efforts reflect the deep commitment of the Georgetown administration, faculty, and students to this cause. So first and foremost, I am here to say thank you. Thank you for keeping human rights front and center. Thank you for training the next generation of human rights advocates, and more generally, introducing students who may never be an activist, may never work for Amnesty International or any other organization specifically devoted to human rights, but who will leave this university with it imbued in their hearts and minds. So thank you, President DeGioia, for all that you do and all that Georgetown has done. (Applause.)

Today, I want to speak to you about the Obama Administration's human rights agenda for the 21st century. It is a subject on the minds of many people who are eager to hear our approach, and understandably so, because it is a critical issue that warrants our energy and

our attention. My comments today will provide an overview of our thinking on human rights and democracy and how they fit into our broader foreign policy, as well as the principles and policies that guide our approach.

But let me also say that what this is not. It could not be a comprehensive accounting of abuses or nations with whom we have raised human rights concerns. It could not be and is not a checklist or a scorecard. We issue a Human Rights Report every year and that goes into great detail on the concerns we have for many countries. But I hope that we can use this opportunity to look at this important issue in a broader light and appreciate its full complexity, moral weight, and urgency. And with that, let me turn to the business at hand.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize last week, President Obama said that while war is never welcome or good, it will sometimes be right and necessary, because, in his words, "Only a just peace based upon the inherent rights and dignity of every individual can be truly lasting." Throughout history and in our own time, there have been those who violently deny that truth. Our mission is to embrace it, to work for lasting peace through a principled human rights agenda, and a practical strategy to implement it.

President Obama's speech also reminded us that our basic values, the ones enshrined in our Declaration of Independence – the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – are not only the source of our strength and endurance; they are the birthright of every woman, man, and child on earth. That is also the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the prerequisite for building a world in which every person has the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential, and the power behind every movement for freedom, every campaign for democracy, every effort to foster development, and every struggle against oppression.

The potential within every person to learn, discover and embrace the world around them, the potential to join freely with others to shape their communities and their societies so that every person can find fulfillment and self-sufficiency, the potential to share life's beauties and tragedies, laughter and tears with the people we love – that potential is sacred. That, however, is a dangerous belief to many who hold power and who construct their position against an "other" – another tribe or religion or race or gender or political party. Standing up against that false sense of identity and expanding the circle of rights and opportunities to all people – advancing their freedoms and possibilities – is why we do what we do.

This week we observe Human Rights Week. At the State Department, though, every week is Human Rights Week. Sixty-one years ago this month, the world's leaders proclaimed a new framework of rights, laws, and institutions that could fulfill the vow of "never again." They affirmed the universality of human rights through the Universal Declaration and legal agreements including those aimed at combating genocide, war crimes and torture, and challenging discrimination against women and racial and religious minorities. Burgeoning civil society movements and nongovernmental organizations became essential partners in advancing the principle that every person counts, and in exposing those who violate that standard.

As we celebrate that progress, though, our focus must be on the work that remains to be done. The preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights encourages us to use it as a, quote, "standard of achievement." And so we should. But we cannot deny the gap that remains between its eloquent promises and the life experiences of so many of our fellow human beings. Now, we must finish the job.

Our human rights agenda for the 21st century is to make human rights a human reality, and the first step is to see human rights in a broad context. Of course, people must be free from the oppression of tyranny, from torture, from discrimination, from the fear of leaders who will imprison or "disappear" them. But they also must be free from the oppression of want – want of food, want of health, want of education, and want of equality in law and in fact.

To fulfill their potential, people must be free to choose laws and leaders; to share and access information, to speak, criticize, and debate. They must be free to worship, associate, and to love in the way that they choose. And they must be free to pursue the dignity that comes with self-improvement and self-reliance, to build their minds and their skills, to bring their goods to the marketplace, and participate in the process of innovation. Human rights have both negative and positive requirements. People should be free from tyranny in whatever form, and they should also be free to seize the opportunities of a full life. That is why supporting democracy and fostering development are cornerstones of our 21st century human rights agenda.

This Administration, like others before us, will promote, support, and defend democracy. We will relinquish neither the word nor the idea to those who have used it too narrowly, or to justify unwise policies. We stand for democracy not because we want other countries to be like us, but because we want all people to enjoy the consistent protection of the rights that are naturally theirs, whether they were born in Tallahassee or Tehran. Democracy has proven the best political system for making human rights a human reality over the long term.

But it is crucial that we clarify what we mean when we talk about democracy, because democracy means not only elections to choose leaders, but also active citizens and a free press and an independent judiciary and transparent and responsive institutions that are accountable to all citizens and protect their rights equally and fairly. In democracies, respecting rights isn't a choice leaders make day by day; it is the reason they govern. Democracies protect and respect citizens every day, not just on Election Day. And democracies demonstrate their greatness not by insisting they are perfect, but by using their institutions and their principles to make themselves and their union more perfect, just as our country continues to do after 233 years.

At the same time, human development must also be part of our human rights agenda. Because basic levels of well-being – food, shelter, health, and education – and of public common goods like environmental sustainability, protection against pandemic disease, provisions for refugees – are necessary for people to exercise their rights, and because human development and democracy are mutually reinforcing. Democratic governments are not likely to survive long if their citizens do not have the basic necessities of life. The

desperation caused by poverty and disease often leads to violence that further imperils the rights of people and threatens the stability of governments. Democracies that deliver on rights, opportunities, and development for their people are stable, strong, and most likely to enable people to live up to their potential.

So human rights, democracy, and development are not three separate goals with three separate agendas. That view doesn't reflect the reality we face. To make a real and long-term difference in people's lives, we have to tackle all three simultaneously with a commitment that is smart, strategic, determined, and long-term. We should measure our success by asking this question: Are more people in more places better able to exercise their universal rights and live up to their potential because of our actions?

Our principles are our North Star, but our tools and tactics must be flexible and reflect the reality on the ground wherever we are trying to have a positive impact. Now, in some cases, governments are willing but unable without support to establish strong institutions and protections for citizens – for example, the nascent democracies in Africa. And we can extend our hand as a partner to help them try to achieve authority and build the progress they desire. In other cases, like Cuba or Nigeria, governments are able but unwilling to make the changes their citizens deserve. There, we must vigorously press leaders to end repression, while supporting those within societies who are working for change. And in cases where governments are both unwilling and unable – places like the eastern Congo – we have to support those courageous individuals and organizations who try to protect people and who battle against the odds to plant seeds for a more hopeful future.

Now, I don't need to tell you that challenges we face are diverse and complicated. And there is not one approach or formula, doctrine or theory that can be easily applied to every situation. But I want to outline four elements of the Obama Administration's approach to putting our principles into action, and share with you some of the challenges we face in doing so.

First, a commitment to human rights starts with universal standards and with holding everyone accountable to those standards, including ourselves. On his second full day in office, President Obama issued an executive order prohibiting the use of torture or official cruelty by any U.S. official and ordered the closure of Guantanamo Bay. Next year, we will report on human trafficking, as we do every year, but this time, not only just on other countries, but also on our own. And we will participate through the United Nations in the Universal Periodic Review of our own human rights record, just as we encourage other nations to do.

By holding ourselves accountable, we reinforce our moral authority to demand that all governments adhere to obligations under international law; among them, not to torture, arbitrarily detain and persecute dissenters, or engage in political killings. Our government and the international community must counter the pretensions of those who deny or abdicate their responsibilities and hold violators to account.

Sometimes, we will have the most impact by publicly denouncing a government action, like the coup in Honduras or violence in Guinea. Other times, we will be more likely to help the oppressed by engaging in tough negotiations behind closed doors, like pressing China and Russia as part of our broader agenda. In every instance, our aim will be to make a difference, not to prove a point.

Calling for accountability doesn't start or stop, however, at naming offenders. Our goal is to encourage – even demand – that governments must also take responsibility by putting human rights into law and embedding them in government institutions; by building strong, independent courts, competent and disciplined police and law enforcement. And once rights are established, governments should be expected to resist the temptation to restrict freedom of expression when criticism arises, and to be vigilant in preventing law from becoming an instrument of oppression, as bills like the one under consideration in Uganda would do to criminalize homosexuality.

We know that all governments and all leaders sometimes fall short. So there have to be internal mechanisms of accountability when rights are violated. Often the toughest test for governments, which is essential to the protection of human rights, is absorbing and accepting criticism. And here too, we should lead by example. In the last six decades we have done this – imperfectly at times but with significant outcomes – from making amends for the internment of our own Japanese American citizens in World War II, to establishing legal recourse for victims of discrimination in the Jim Crow South, to passing hate crimes legislation to include attacks against gays and lesbians. When injustice anywhere is ignored, justice everywhere is denied. Acknowledging and remedying mistakes does not make us weaker, it reaffirms the strength of our principles and institutions.

Second, we must be pragmatic and agile in pursuit of our human rights agenda – not compromising on our principles, but doing what is most likely to make them real. And we will use all the tools at our disposal, and when we run up against a wall, we will not retreat with resignation or recriminations, or repeatedly run up against the same well, but respond with strategic resolve to find another way to effect change and improve people's lives.

We acknowledge that one size does not fit all. And when old approaches aren't working, we won't be afraid to attempt new ones, as we have this year by ending the stalemate of isolation and instead pursuing measured engagement with Burma. In Iran, we have offered to negotiate directly with the government on nuclear issues, but have at the same time expressed solidarity with those inside Iran struggling for democratic change. As President Obama said in his Nobel speech, "They have us on their side."

And we will hold governments accountable for their actions, as we have just recently by terminating Millennium Challenge Corporation grants this year for Madagascar and Niger in the wake of government behavior. As the President said last week, "we must try as best we can to balance isolation and engagement; pressure and incentives, so that human rights and dignity are advanced over time."

We are also working for positive change within multilateral institutions. They are valuable tools that, when in their best, leverage the efforts of many countries around a common purpose. So we have rejoined the UN Human Rights Council not because we don't see its flaws, but because we think that participating gives us the best chance to be a constructive influence.

In our first session, we cosponsored the successful resolution on Freedom of Expression, a forceful declaration of principle at a time when that freedom is jeopardized by new efforts to constrain religious practice, including recently in Switzerland, and by efforts to criminalize the defamation of religion – a false solution which exchanges one wrong for another. And in the United Nations Security Council, I was privileged to chair the September session where we passed a resolution mandating protections against sexual violence in armed conflict.

Principled pragmatism informs our approach on human rights with all countries, but particularly with key countries like China and Russia. Cooperation with each of those is critical to the health of the global economy and the nonproliferation agenda we seek, also to managing security issues like North Korea and Iran, and addressing global problems like climate change.

The United States seeks positive relationships with China and Russia, and that means candid discussions of divergent views. In China, we call for protection of rights of minorities in Tibet and Xinxiang; for the rights to express oneself and worship freely; and for civil society and religious organizations to advocate their positions within a framework of the rule of law. And we believe strongly that those who advocate peacefully for reform within the constitution, such as Charter 2008 signatories, should not be prosecuted.

With Russia, we deplore the murders of journalists and activists and support the courageous individuals who advocate at great peril for democracy. With China, Russia, and others, we are engaging on issues of mutual interest while also engaging societal actors in these same countries who are working to advance human rights and democracy. The assumption that we must either pursue human rights or our "national interests" is wrong. The assumption that only coercion and isolation are effective tools for advancing democratic change is also wrong.

Across our diplomacy and development efforts, we keep striving for innovative ways to achieve results. That's why I commissioned the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review to develop a forward-looking strategy built on analysis of our objectives, our challenges, our tools, and our capacities to achieve America's foreign policy and national security objectives. And make no mistake, issues of Democracy and Governance – D&G as they are called at USAID – are central to this review.

The third element of our approach is that we support change driven by citizens and their communities. The project of making human rights a human reality cannot be just one for governments. It requires cooperation among individuals and organizations within

communities and across borders. It means that we work with others who share our commitment to securing lives of dignity for all who share the bonds of humanity.

Six weeks ago, in Morocco, I met with civil society activists from across the Middle East and North Africa. They exemplify how lasting change comes from within and how it depends on activists who create the space in which engaged citizens and civil society can build the foundations for rights-respecting development and democracy. Outside governments and global civil society cannot impose change, but we can promote and bolster it and defend it. We can encourage and provide support for local grassroots leaders, providing a lifeline of protection to human rights and democracy activists when they get in trouble, as they often do, for raising sensitive issues and voicing dissent. This means using tools like our Global Human Rights Defenders Fund, which in the last year has provided targeted legal and relocation assistance to 170 human rights defenders around the world.

And we can stand with these defenders publicly, as we have by sending a high-level diplomatic mission to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, and as I have done around the world, from Guatemala to Kenya to Egypt, speaking out for civil society and political leaders who are working to try to change their societies from within, and also working through the backchannels for the safety of dissidents and protecting them from persecution.

We can amplify the voices of activists and advocates working on these issues by shining a spotlight on their progress. They often pursue their mission in isolation, often so marginalized within their own societies. And we can endorse the legitimacy of their efforts. We recognize these with honors like the Women of Courage awards that First Lady Michelle Obama and I presented earlier this year and the Human Rights Defenders award I will present next month, and we can applaud others like Vital Voices, the RFK Center for Justice and Human Rights, and the Lantos Foundation, that do the same.

We can give them access to public forums that lend visibility to their ideas, and continue to press for a role for nongovernmental organizations in multilateral institutions like the United Nations and the OSCE. And we can enlist other allies like international labor unions who were instrumental in the Solidarity movement in Poland or religious organizations who are championing the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS in Africa.

We can help change agents, gain access to and share information through the internet and mobile phones so that they can communicate and organize. With camera phones and Facebook pages, thousands of protestors in Iran have broadcast their demands for rights denied, creating a record for all the world, including Iran's leaders, to see. I've established a special unit inside the State Department to use technology for 21st century statecraft.

In virtually every country I visit – from Indonesia to Iraq, from South Korea to the Dominican Republic – I conduct a town hall or roundtable discussion with groups outside of government to learn from them, and to provide a platform for their voices, ideas, and opinions. When I was recently in Russia, I visited an independent radio station to give an interview, and express through word and deed our support for independent media at a time when free expression is under threat.

On my visits to China, I have made a point of meeting with women activists. The UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 inspired a generation of women civil society leaders who have become rights defenders for today's China. In 1998, I met with a small group of lawyers in a crowded apartment on the fifth floor of a walk-up building. They described for me their efforts to win rights for women to own property, have a say in marriage and divorce, and be treated as equal citizens.

When I visited China again earlier this year, I met with some of the same women, but this group had grown and expanded its scope. Now there were women working not just for legal rights, but for environmental, health, and economic rights as well.

Yet one of them, Dr. Gao Yaojie, has been harassed for speaking out about AIDS in China. She should instead be applauded by her government for helping to confront the crisis. NGOs and civil society leaders need the financial, technical and political support we provide. Many repressive regimes have tried to limit the independence and effectiveness of activists and NGOs by restricting their activities, including more than 25 governments that have recently adopted new restrictions. But our funding and support can give a foothold to local organizations, training programs, and independent media. And of course, one of the most important ways that we and others in the international community can lay the foundation for change from the bottom up is through targeted assistance to those in need, and through partnerships that foster broad-based economic development.

To build success for the long run, our development assistance needs to be as effective as possible at delivering results and paving the way for broad-based growth and long-term self-reliance. Beyond giving people the capacity to meet their material needs for today, economic empowerment should give them a stake in securing their own futures, in seeing their societies become the kind of democracies that protect rights and govern fairly. So we will pursue a rights-respecting approach to development – consulting with local communities, ensuring transparency, midwife-ing accountable institutions – so our development activities act in concert with our efforts to support democratic governance. That is the pressing challenge we face in Afghanistan and Pakistan today.

The fourth element of our approach is that we will widen our focus. We will not forget that positive change must be reinforced and strengthened where hope is on the rise, and we will not ignore or overlook places of seemingly intractable tragedy and despair. Where human lives hang in the balance, we must do what we can to tilt that balance toward a better future.

Our efforts to support those working for human rights, economic empowerment, and democratic governance are driven by commitment, not convenience. But they have to be sustained. They cannot be subject to the whims or the wins of political change in our own country. Democratic progress is urgent but it is not quick, and we should never take for granted its permanence. Backsliding is always a threat, as we've learned in places like Kenya where the perpetrators of post-election violence have thus far escaped justice; and in the Americas where we are worried about leaders who have seized property, trampled rights, and abused justice to enhance personal rule.

And when democratic change occurs, we cannot afford to become complacent. Instead, we have to continue reinforcing NGOs and the fledgling institutions of democracy. Young democracies like Liberia, East Timor, Moldova and Kosovo need our help to secure improvements in health, education and welfare. We must stay engaged to nurture democratic development in places like Ukraine and Georgia, which experienced democratic breakthroughs earlier this decade but have struggled to consolidate their democratic gains because of both internal and external factors.

So we stand ready – both in our bilateral relationships and through international institutions – to help governments that have committed to improving themselves by assisting them in fighting corruption and helping train police forces and public servants. And we will support regional organizations and institutions like the Organization of American States, the African Union, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, where they take their own steps to defend democratic principles and institutions.

Success stories deserve our attention so they continue to make progress and also serve as a model for others. And even as we reinforce the successes, conscience demands that we are not cowed by the overwhelming difficulty of making inroads against misery in the hard places like Sudan, Congo, North Korea, Zimbabwe, or on the hard issues like ending gender inequality and discrimination against gays and lesbians, from the Middle East to Latin America, Africa to Asia.

Now, we have to continue to press for solutions in Sudan where ongoing tensions threaten to add to the devastation wrought by genocide in Darfur and an overwhelming refugee crisis. We will work to identify ways that we and our partners can enhance human security, while at the same time focusing greater attention on efforts to prevent genocide elsewhere.

And of course, we have to remain focused on women – women's rights, women's roles, and women's responsibilities. As I said in Beijing in 1995, "human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights," but oh, I wish it could be so easily translated into action and changes. That ideal is far from being realized in so many places around our world, but there is no place that so epitomizes the very difficult, tragic circumstances confronting women than in eastern Congo.

I was in Goma last August, the epicenter of one of the most violent and chaotic regions on earth. And when I was there, I met with victims of horrific gender and sexual violence, and I met with refugees driven from their homes by the many military forces operating there. I heard from those working to end the conflicts and to protect the victims in such dire circumstances. I saw the best and the worst of humanity in a single day, the unspeakable acts of violence that have left women physically and emotionally brutalized, and the heroism of the women and men themselves, of the doctors, nurses and volunteers working to repair bodies and spirits.

They are on the front lines of the struggle for human rights. Seeing firsthand their courage and tenacity of they and the Congolese people and the internal fortitude that keeps them going is not only humbling, but inspires me every day to keep working.

So those four aspects of our approach – accountability, principled pragmatism, partnering from the bottom up, keeping a wide focus where rights are at stake – will help build a foundation that enables people to stand and rise above poverty, hunger, and disease and that secures their rights under democratic governance. We must lift the ceiling of oppression, corruption, and violence.

And we must light a fire of human potential through access to education and economic opportunity. Build the foundation, lift the ceiling, and light the fire all together, all at once. Because when a person has food and education but not the freedom to discuss and debate with fellow citizens, he is denied the life he deserves. And when a person is too hungry or sick to work or vote or worship, she is denied a life she deserves. Freedom doesn't come in half measures, and partial remedies cannot redress the whole problem.

But we know that the champions of human potential have never had it easy. We may call rights inalienable, but making them so has always been hard work. And no matter how clearly we see our ideals, taking action to make them real requires tough choices. Even if everyone agrees that we should do whatever is most likely to improve the lives of people on the ground, we will not always agree on what course of action fits that description in every case. That is the nature of governing. We all know examples of good intentions that did not produce results, some that even produced unintended consequences that led to greater violations of human rights. And we can learn from the instances in which we have fallen short in the past, because those past difficulties are proof of how difficult progress is, but we do not accept the argument by some that progress in certain places is impossible, because we know progress happens.

Ghana emerged from an era of coups to one of stable democratic governance. Indonesia moved from repressive rule to a dynamic democracy that is Islamic and secular. Chile exchanged dictatorship for democracy and an open economy. Mongolia's constitutional reforms successfully ushered in multiparty democracy without violence. And there is no better example than the progress made in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall 20 years ago, an event I was privileged to help celebrate last month at the Brandenburg Gate.

While the work in front of us is daunting and vast, we face the future together with partners on every continent, partners in faith-based organizations, NGOs, and socially responsible corporations, and partners in governments. From India, the world's largest democracy, and one that continues to use democratic processes and principles to perfect its union of 1.1 billion people, to Botswana where the new president in Africa's oldest democracy has promised to govern according to what he calls the "5 Ds" – democracy, dignity, development, discipline, and delivery – providing a recipe for responsible governance that contrasts starkly with the unnecessary and manmade tragedy in neighboring Zimbabwe.

In the end, this isn't just about what we do; it is about who we are. And we cannot be the people we are – people who believe in human rights – if we opt out of this fight. Believing in human rights means committing ourselves to action, and when we sign up for the promise of rights that apply everywhere, to everyone, that rights will be able to protect and enable human dignity, we also sign up for the hard work of making that promise a reality.

Those of you here at this great university spend time studying the cases of what we've tried to do in human rights, or as Jas said, the culture of human rights. You see the shortcomings and the shortfalls. You see the fact that, as Mario Cuomo famously said about politics here in the United States, we campaign in poetry and we govern in prose. Well, that's true internationally as well. But we need your ideas, we need your criticism, we need your support, we need your intelligent analysis of how together we can slowly, steadily expand that circle of opportunity and rights to every single person.

It is work that we take so seriously. It is work that we know we don't have all the answers for. But it is the work that America signed up to do. And we will continue, day by day, inch by inch, to try to make whatever progress is humanly possible. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

MODERATOR: Thank you, Secretary Clinton, for an inspiring, comprehensive, and wonderful speech. It made me proud to be an American.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you so much.

MODERATOR: And proud to be at Georgetown, too. (Laughter.)

The Secretary has time for three questions, and we thought because so many of you have abandoned your final papers to be here – the students, that is – that we would take those questions from our students. So let me ask you – we have several people along the sides with microphones. Let – okay, here's somebody with a microphone. Have we got one more? Okay.

So let's have a first question from a student. That doesn't look like a student. (Laughter.) Let's get – here, let's get a young person here. We're not discriminating. We just want a calm approach to things.

QUESTION: Hello, Secretary Clinton. Thank you so much for speaking to us today. You spoke about the situation in Uganda. Could you please talk to us a little bit more about how the United States can protect the rights of LGBT people in areas where those rights are not respected?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes. And first let me say that over this past year, we have elevated into our human rights dialogues and our public statements a very clear message about protecting the rights of the LGBT community worldwide. And we are particularly concerned about some of the specific cases that have come to our attention around the world. There have been organized efforts to kill and maim gays and lesbians in some

countries that we have spoken out about, and also conveyed our very strong concerns about to their governments – not that they were governmentally implemented or even that the government was aware of them, but that the governments need to pay much greater attention to the kinds of abuses that we've seen in Iraq, for example.

We are deeply concerned about some of the stories coming out of Iran. In large measure, in reaction, we think, to the response to the elections back in June, there have been abuses committed within the detention facilities and elsewhere that we are deeply concerned about. And then the example that I used of a piece of legislation in Uganda which would not only criminalize homosexuality but attach the death penalty to it. We have expressed our concerns directly, indirectly, and we will continue to do so. The bill has not gone through the Ugandan legislature, but it has a lot of public support by various groups, including religious leaders in Uganda. And we view it as a very serious potential violation of human rights.

So it is clear that across the world this is a new frontier in the minds of many people about how we protect the LGBT community, but it is at the top of our list because we see many instances where there is a very serious assault on the physical safety and an increasing effort to marginalize people. And we think it's important for the United States to stand against that and to enlist others to join us in doing so.

MODERATOR: Right here.

QUESTION: Good morning, Secretary Clinton. Thank you so much for being here at Georgetown. You brought up Iran today, and I really appreciate that as an Iranian American. I'm a graduate student here and had the pleasure of being in Iran this summer for my first trip, and to witness really what happened after the election was an incredible moment in history.

Now that six months has passed after the election, what can the United States do to balance our support of the human rights activists and demonstrators in the streets of Iran with our agenda regarding the broader international security issues with Iran's proposed nuclear program? So how do we balance those two issues?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Right. Well, it is a balancing act. But the more important balancing act is to make sure that our very strong opposition to what is going on inside Iran doesn't in any way undermine the legitimacy of the protest movement that has taken hold. Now, this is one of those very good examples of a hard call. After the election and the reaction that began almost immediately by people who felt that the election was invalid, put us in a position of seriously considering what is the best way we can support those who are putting their lives on the line by going into the streets. We wanted to convey clear support, but we didn't want the attention shifted from the legitimate concerns to the United States, because we had nothing to do with the spontaneous reaction that grew up in response to the behavior of the Iranian Government.

So it's been a delicate walk, but I think that the activists inside Iran know that we support them. We have certainly encouraged their continuing communication of what's going on inside Iran. One of the calls that we made shortly after the election in the midst of the demonstrations is this unit of these very tech-savvy young people that we've created inside the State Department knew that there was a lot of communication going on about demonstrations and sharing information on Twitter, and that totally unconnected to what was going on in Iran, Twitter had planned some kind of lapse in service to do something on their system – you can tell I have no idea what they were doing. (Laughter.) I mean, you know, I don't know Twitter from Tweeter, so – (laughter) – to be honest with you.

So these young tech people in the State Department called Twitter and said don't take Twitter down right now. Whatever you're going to do to reboot or whatever it is – (laughter) – don't take Twitter down because people in Iran are dependent upon Twitter. So we have done that careful balancing.

Now, clearly, we think that pursuing an agenda of nonproliferation is a human rights issue. I mean, what would be worse than nuclear material or even a nuclear weapon being in the hands of either a state or a non-state actor that would be used to intimidate and threaten and even, in the worst-case scenario, destroy?

So we see a continuum. So pursuing what we think is in the national security interest not only of the United States but countries in Europe and in the Middle East is also a human rights issue. So we do not want to be in an either/or position: Are we going to pursue nonproliferation with Iran or are we going to support the demonstrators inside Iran? We're going to do both to the best of our ability to get a result that will further the cause we are seeking to support.

MODERATOR: One final question in the back. Right there, with the red. Right. Christmas red.

QUESTION: Thank you. I am wondering what you see the role of artists doing in helping to promote human rights. I had the privilege earlier this summer to hear the playwright Lynn Nottage speak in one of the Senate buildings after she advocated for women's rights in the Congo, and I wonder how you see creative practice accompanying and amplifying policy.

SECRETARY CLINTON: That is a wonderful question because I think the arts and artists are one of our most effective tools in reaching beyond and through repressive regimes, in giving hope to people. It was a very effective tool during the Cold War. I've had so many Eastern Europeans tell me that it was American music, it was American literature, it was American poetry that kept them going. I remember when Vaclav Havel came to the White House during my husband's administration, and we were having a state dinner for him. And I said, "Well, who would you like to entertain at the state dinner?" And I didn't know what he was going to say. And he said, "Lou Reed." (Laughter.) "It was his music that was just so important for us – in prison, out of prison."

Well, you could name many other American artists who have traveled. We're going to try to increase the number of artistic exchanges we do so that we can get people into settings where they will be able to directly communicate. Now, with communication being what it is today, you can download them and all the rest, but there's something about the American Government sending somebody to make that case which I think is very important to our commitment.

Also, artists can bright to light in a gripping, dramatic way some of the challenges we face. You mentioned the play about women in the Congo. I remember some years ago seeing a play about women in Bosnia during the conflict there. It was so gripping. I still see the faces of those women who were pulled from their homes, separated from their husbands, often raped and left just as garbage on the side of the road. So I think that artists both individually and through their works can illustrate better than any speech I can give or any government policy we can promulgate that the spirit that lives within each of us, the right to think and dream and expand our boundaries, is not confined, no matter how hard they try, by any regime anywhere in the world. There is no way that you can deprive people from feeling those stirrings inside their soul. And artists can give voice to that. They can give shape and movement to it. And it is so important in places where people feel forgotten and marginalized and depressed and hopeless to have that glimmer that there is a better future, that there is a better way that they just have to hold onto.

So I'm going to do what I can to continue to increase and enhance our artistic outreach, but this is also a great area for private foundations, for NGOs, for artists themselves, for universities like Georgetown to be engaged in. It's interesting, in today's world we are deluged with so much information. I mean, we are living in information overload time. And so we need ways of cutting through all of that. We're also living in an on-the-one-hand-this and on-another-hand-that sort of media environment. I always joke that if a television station or a newspaper interviews somebody who is claiming that the earth is round, they have to put on somebody from the Flat Earth Society because that's balance, fair and balanced coverage. (Laughter and applause.)

And so part of what we have to do is look for those ways of breaking through all of that. And I think that the power of the arts to do that is so enormous, and we can't ever forget about the role that it must play in giving life to the aspirations of people around the world.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
For Immediate Release